FRANCIS THOMPSON

ESSAYS OF TO-DAY AND YESTERDAY

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ESSAYS OF
TO-DAY AND YESTERDAY

FRANCIS THOMPSON

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

WHEN the Shelley essay—here only partially reproduced—first appeared in *The Dublin Review* (1908) George Wyndham called it "the most important contribution to pure Letters written in English during the last twenty years," adding that it was "a human document of intense suffering." Similarly in "Health and Holiness," also presented here in salient passages, some revelation of the writer's own hard history is made; and through others of these reprints a like thread of intimate personal experience may be traced. "The Fourth Order of Humanity" carries the poet back to his Lancashire nursery and to his dolls. He passes to the cricket-field in a paper that must always rank among biographical surprises. Of his "very own Thomas De Quincey" he could write almost autobiographically; and Henley, rated in these pages as poet and critic, happened to be one among the very few contemporaries whose acquaintance he made. In the eighties of the last century it was still true to say—as he does in his estimate of James Thomson—that the author of *The Seasons* is "the bard in popular possession of the name he bears"; and it is Francis Thompson's own doing if his statement is questionable to-day. The last four papers in this volume are for the first time here assembled in book form.

W. M.

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SHELLEY

WE have among us at the present day no lineal descendant, in the poetical order, of Shelley; and any such offspring of the abundingly spontaneous Shelley is hardly possible, still less likely, on account of the defect by which (we think) contemporary poetry in general, as compared with the poetry of the early nineteenth century, is mildewed. That defect is the predominance of art over inspiration, of body over soul.

An age that is ceasing to produce child-like children cannot produce a Shelley. For both as poet and man he was essentially a child.

We, of this self-conscious, incredulous generation, sentimentalize our children, analyse our children, think we are endowed with a special capacity to sympathize and identify ourselves with children; we play at being children. And the result is that we are not more child-like, but our children are less child-like. It is so tiring to stoop to the child, so much easier to lift the child up to you. Know you what it is to be a child? It is to be something very different from the man of to-day. It is to have a spirit yet streaming from the waters of baptism; it is to believe in love, to believe in loveliness, to believe in belief; it is to be so little that the elves can reach to whisper in your ear; it is to turn pumpkins into coaches, and mice into horses, lowness into loftiness, and nothing into everything, for each child has its fairy godmother in its own soul; it is to live in a nutshell and to count yourself the king of infinite space; it is

> To see a world in a grain of sand,
> And a heaven in a wild flower,

> Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
> And eternity in an hour ;

it is to know not as yet that you are under sentence of life, nor petition that it be commuted into death. When we become conscious in dreaming that we dream, the dream is on the point of breaking; when we become conscious in living that we live, the ill dream is but just beginning. Now if Shelley was but too conscious of the dream, in other respects Dryden's false and famous line might have been applied to him with very much less than its usual untruth.[1] To the last, in a degree uncommon even among poets, he retained the idiosyncrasy of childhood, expanded and matured without differentiation. To the last he was the enchanted child.

This was, as is well known, patent in his life. It is as really, though perhaps less obviously, manifest in his poetry, the sincere effluence of his life. And it may not, therefore, be amiss to consider whether it was conditioned by anything beyond his congenital nature. For our part, we believe it to have been equally largely the outcome of his early and long isolation. Men given to retirement and abstract study are notoriously liable to contract a certain degree of childlikeness: and if this be the case when we segregate a man, how much more when we segregate a child! It is when they are taken into the solution of school-life that children, by the reciprocal interchange of influence with their fellows, undergo the series of reactions which converts them from children into boys and from boys into men. The

[1] Wordsworth's adaptation of it, however, is true. Men are not " children of a larger growth," but the child *is* father of the man, since the parent is only partially reproduced in his offspring.

intermediate stage must be traversed to reach the final one.

Now Shelley never could have been a man, for he never was a boy. And the reason lay in the persecution which over-clouded his school-days. Of that persecution's effect upon him he has left us, in *The Revolt of Islam*, a picture which to many or most people very probably seems a poetical exaggeration; partly because Shelley appears to have escaped physical brutality, partly because adults are inclined to smile tenderly at childish sorrows which are not caused by physical suffering. That he escaped for the most part bodily violence is nothing to the purpose. It is the petty malignant annoyance recurring hour by hour, day by day, month by month, until its accumulation becomes an agony; it is this which is the most terrible weapon that boys have against their fellow boy, who is powerless to shun it because, unlike the man, he has virtually no privacy. His is the torture which the ancients used, when they anointed their victim with honey and exposed him naked to the restless fever of the flies. He is a little St Sebastian, sinking under the incessant flight of shafts which skilfully avoid the vital parts.

We do not, therefore, suspect Shelley of exaggeration: he was, no doubt, in terrible misery. Those who think otherwise must forget their own past. Most people, we suppose, *must* forget what they were like when they were children: otherwise they would know that the griefs of their childhood were passionate abandonment, *déchirants* (to use a characteristically favourite phrase of modern French literature) as the griefs of their maturity. Children's griefs are little, certainly; but so is the child, so is its endurance, so is its field of vision, while its nervous impressionability is

keener than ours. Grief is a matter of relativity; the sorrow should be estimated by its proportion to the sorrower; a gash is as painful to one as an amputation to another. Pour a puddle into a thimble, or an Atlantic into Etna; both thimble and mountain overflow. Adult fools! Would not the angels smile at *our* griefs, were not angels too wise to smile at them?

So beset, the child fled into the tower of his own soul, and raised the drawbridge. He threw out a reserve, encysted in which he grew to maturity unaffected by the intercourses that modify the maturity of others into the thing we call a man. The encysted child developed until it reached years of virility, until those later Oxford days in which Hogg encountered it; then, bursting at once from its cyst and the university, it swam into a world not illegitimately perplexed by such a whim of the gods. It was, of course, only the completeness and duration of this seclusion—lasting from the gate of boyhood to the threshold of youth—which was peculiar to Shelley. Most poets, probably, like most saints, are prepared for their mission by an initial segregation, as the seed is buried to germinate: before they can utter the oracle of poetry, they must first be divided from the body of men. It is the severed head that makes the seraph.

Shelley's life frequently exhibits in him the magnified child. It is seen in his fondness for apparently futile amusements, such as the sailing of paper boats. This was, in the truest sense of the word, child-like; not, as it is frequently called and considered, childish. That is to say, it was not a mindless triviality, but the genuine child's power of investing little things with imaginative interest; the same power, though differently devoted, which produced much of his poetry. Very possibly in

the paper boat he saw the magic bark of Laon and Cythna, or

> That thinnest boat
> In which the mother of the months is borne
> By ebbing night into her western cave.

In fact, if you mark how favourite an idea, under varying forms, is this in his verse, you will perceive that all the charmed boats which glide down the stream of his poetry are but glorified resurrections of the little paper argosies which trembled down the Isis.

And the child appeared no less often in Shelley the philosopher than in Shelley the idler. It is seen in his repellent no less than in his amiable weaknesses; in the unteachable folly of a love that made its goal its starting-point, and firmly expected spiritual rest from each new divinity, though it had found none from the divinities antecedent. For we are clear that this was no mere straying of sensual appetite, but a straying, strange and deplorable, of the spirit; that (contrary to what Coventry Patmore has said) he left a woman not because he was tired of her arms, but because he was tired of her soul. When he found Mary Shelley wanting, he seems to have fallen into the mistake of Wordsworth, who complained in a charming piece of unreasonableness that his wife's love, which had been a fountain, was now only a well:

> Such change, and at the very door
> Of my fond heart, hath made me poor.

Wordsworth probably learned, what Shelley was incapable of learning, that love can never permanently be a fountain. A living poet, in an article[1] which you

[1] *The Rhythm of Life*, by Alice Meynell.

almost fear to breathe upon lest you should flutter some of the frail pastel-like bloom, has said the thing: "Love itself has tidal moments, lapses and flows due to the metrical rule of the interior heart." Elementary reason should proclaim this true. Love is an affection, its display an emotion: love is the air, its display is the wind. An affection may be constant; an emotion can no more be constant than the wind can constantly blow. All, therefore, that a man can reasonably ask of his wife is that her love should be indeed a well. A well; but a Bethesda-well, into which from time to time the angel of tenderness descends to trouble the waters for the healing of the beloved. Such a love Shelley's second wife appears unquestionably to have given him. Nay, she was content that he should veer while she remained true; she companioned him intellectually, shared his views, entered into his aspirations, and yet—yet, even at the date of *Epipsychidion*, the foolish child, her husband, assigned her the part of moon to Emilia Viviani's sun, and lamented that he was barred from final, certain, irreversible happiness by a cold and callous society. Yet few poets were so mated before, and no poet was so mated afterwards, until Browning stooped and picked up a fair-coined soul that lay rusting in a pool of tears.

In truth, his very unhappiness and discontent with life, in so far as it was not the inevitable penalty of the ethical anarch, can only be ascribed to this same child-like irrationality—though in such a form it is irrationality hardly peculiar to Shelley. Pity, if you will, his spiritual ruins, and the neglected early training which was largely their cause; but the pity due to his outward circumstances has been strangely exaggerated. The obloquy from which he suffered he deliberately and wantonly courted. For the rest, his lot was one that

many a young poet might envy. He had faithful friends, a faithful wife, an income small but assured. Poverty never dictated to his pen; the designs on his bright imagination were never etched by the sharp fumes of necessity.

If, as has chanced to others—as chanced, for example, to Mangan—outcast from home, health, and hope, with a charred past and a bleared future, an anchorite without detachment, and self-cloistered without self-sufficingness, deposed from a world which he had not abdicated, pierced with thorns which formed no crown, a poet hopeless of the bays, and a martyr hopeless of the palm, a land cursed against the dews of love, an exile banned and proscribed even from the innocent arms of childhood—he were burning helpless at the stake of his unquenchable heart, then he might have been inconsolable, then might he have cast the gorge at life, then have cowered in the darkening chamber of his being, tapestried with mouldering hopes, and hearkened to the winds that swept across the illimitable wastes of death. But no such hapless lot was Shelley's as that of his own contemporaries—Keats, half-chewed in the jaws of London and spit dying on to Italy; De Quincey, who, if he escaped, escaped rent and maimed from those cruel jaws; Coleridge, whom they dully mumbled for the major portion of his life. Shelley had competence, poetry, love; yet he wailed that he could lie down like a tired child and weep away his life of care! Is it ever so with you, sad brother? is it ever so with me? and is there no drinking of pearls except they be dissolved in biting tears? "Which of us has his desire, or having it, is satisfied?"

Coming to Shelley's poetry, we peep over the wild

mask of revolutionary metaphysics, and we see the winsome face of the child. Perhaps none of his poems is more purely and typically Shelleian than *The Cloud*, and it is interesting to note how essentially it springs from the faculty of make-believe. The same thing is conspicuous, though less purely conspicuous, throughout his singing; it is the child's faculty of make-believe raised to the *n*th power. He is still at play, save only that his play is such as manhood stops to watch, and his playthings are those which the gods give their children. The universe is his box of toys. He dabbles his fingers in the day-fall. He is gold-dusty with tumbling amidst the stars. He makes bright mischief with the moon. The meteors nuzzle their noses in his hand. He teases into growling the kennelled thunder, and laughs at the shaking of its fiery chain. He dances in and out of the gates of heaven: its floor is littered with his broken fancies. He runs wild over the fields of ether. He chases the rolling world. He gets between the feet of the horses of the sun. He stands in the lap of patient Nature, and twines her loosened tresses after a hundred wilful fashions, to see how she will look nicest in his song.

After all, perhaps the poems on which the lover of Shelley leans most lovingly, which he has oftenest in his mind, which best represent Shelley to him, and which he instinctively reverts to when Shelley's name is mentioned, are some of the shorter poems and detached lyrics. Here Shelley forgets for a while all that ever makes his verse turbid; forgets that he is anything but a poet, forgets sometimes that he is anything but a child; lies back in his skiff, and looks at the clouds. He plays truant from earth, slips through the wicket of fancy into heaven's meadow, and goes gathering stars.

Here we have that absolute virgin-gold of song which is the scarcest among human products, and for which we can go to but three poets—Coleridge, Shelley, Chopin,[1] and perhaps we should add Keats:—*Christabel* and *Kubla Khan*; *The Skylark*, *The Cloud*, and *The Sensitive Plant* (in its first two parts); *The Eve of Saint Agnes* and *The Nightingale*; certain of the Nocturnes; these things make very quintessentialized loveliness. It is attar of poetry.

Remark, as a thing worth remarking, that, although Shelley's diction is at other times singularly rich, it ceases in these poems to be rich, or to obtrude itself at all; it is imperceptible; his Muse has become a veritable Echo, whose body has dissolved from about her voice. Indeed, when his diction is richest, nevertheless the poetry so dominates the expression that we only feel the latter as an atmosphere until we are satiated with the former; then we discover with surprise to how imperial a vesture we had been blinded by gazing on the face of his song. A lesson, this, deserving to be conned by a generation so opposite in tendency as our own: a lesson that in poetry, as in the Kingdom of God, we should not take thought too greatly wherewith we shall be clothed, but seek first [2] the spirit, and all these things will be added unto us.

Enchanted child, born into a world unchildlike; spoiled darling of Nature, playmate of her elemental daughters; "pard-like spirit, beautiful and swift," laired amidst the burning fastnesses of his own fervid mind; bold foot along the verges of precipitous dream; light

[1] Such analogies between masters in sister arts are often interesting. In some respects, is not Brahms the Browning of music?

[2] Seek *first*, not seek *only*.

leaper from crag to crag of inaccessible fancies; towering Genius, whose soul rose like a ladder between heaven and earth with the angels of song ascending and descending it;—he is shrunken into the little vessel of death, and sealed with the unshatterable seal of doom, and cast down deep below the rolling tides of Time. Mighty meat for little guests, when the heart of Shelley was laid in the cemetery of Caius Cestius! Beauty, music, sweetness, tears—the mouth of the worm has fed of them all. Into that sacred bridal-gloom of death where he holds his nuptials with eternity let not our rash speculations follow him; let us hope rather that as, amidst material nature, where our dull eyes see only ruin, the finer eye of science has discovered life in putridity and vigour in decay, seeing dissolution even and disintegration, which in the mouth of man symbolize disorder, to be in the works of God undeviating order, and the manner of our corruption to be no less wonderful than the manner of our health,—so, amidst the supernatural universe, some tender undreamed surprise of life in doom awaited that wild nature, which, worn by warfare with itself, its Maker, and all the world, now

> Sleeps, and never palates more the dug,
> The beggar's nurse, and Cæsar's.

THE FOURTH ORDER OF HUMANITY

IN the beginning of things came man, sequent to him woman; on woman followed the child, and on the child the doll. It is a climax of development; and the crown of these is the doll.

To the doll's supremacy in beauty, woman's self bears testimony, implicit, if unconscious. For ages has she tricked her face in pigment, and her brows in alien hair; her *contours* she has filled to counterfeit roundness, her eyes and lashes tinged: and all in a frustrate essay to compass by Art what in the doll is right of Nature. Even the child exhibits distinct inferiorities. It is full of thwartness and eating and drinking, and selffulness (selfishness were a term too dully immitigate), and a plentiful lack of that repose wherein the doll is nearest to the quiet gods. For my own part, I profess that much acquaintance only increases my consideration for this fourth order of humanity: always excepting the very light-blue-eyed doll, in whose regard there is a certain chill *hauteur* against which my diffidence is not proof.

Consider the life of dolls. At the whim of some *debonair* maternal tyranness, they veer on every wind of mutability; are the sport of imputed moods, suffer qualities over which they have no election,—are sorry or glad, indocile or amiable, at their mistress' whim and mandate; they are visited with stripes, or the soft aspersion of kisses; with love delectably persecuted, or consigned to the clement quiet of neglect; exalted to the dimple of their mistress' cheek, or dejected to the

servile floor; rent and mutilated, or rocked and murmured over; blamed or petted, be-rated or loved. Nor why it is thus or thus with them, are they any wise witting; wherefore these things should be, they know not at all.

> Consider the life of us—
> Oh, my cousins the dolls!

Some consciousness, I take it, there was; some secret sense of this occult co-rivalry in fate, which withheld me even in childhood from the youthful male's contempt for these short-lived parasites of the nursery. I questioned with wounded feelings the straitened feminine intolerance which said to the boy: "Thou shalt not hold a baby; thou shalt not possess a doll." In the matter of babies, I was hopeless to shake the illiberal prejudice; in the matter of dolls, I essayed to confound it. By eloquence and fine diplomacy I wrung from my sisters a concession of dolls; whence I date my knowledge of the kind.

But ineluctible sex declared itself. I dramatized them, I fell in love with them; I did not father them; intolerance was justified of its children. One in particular I selected, one with surpassing fairness crowned, and bowed before the fourteen inches of her skirt. She was beautiful. She was one of Shakespeare's heroines. She was an amity of inter-removed miracles; all wrangling excellences at pact in one sole doll; the frontiers of jealous virtues marched in her, yet trespassed not against her peace. I desired for her some worthy name, and asked of my mother: Who was the fairest among living women? Laughingly was I answered that I was a hard questioner, but that perhaps the Empress of the French bore the bell for beauty. Hence, accordingly, my Princess of puppetdom received

her style; and at this hour, though she has long since vanished to some realm where all sawdust is wiped for ever from dolls' wounds, I cannot hear that name but the Past touches me with a rigid agglomeration of small china fingers.

But why with childhood and with her should I close the blushing recital of my puppet-loves? Men are but children of a larger growth; and your statue, I warrant me, is but your crescent doll. Wherefore, then, should I leave unmemorized the statue which thralled my youth in a passion such as feminine mortality was skill-less to instigate? Nor at this let any boggle; for *she* was a goddess. Statue I have called her; but indeed she was a bust, a head, a face—and who that saw that face could have thought to regard further? She stood nameless in the gallery of sculptural casts which she strangely deigned to inhabit; but I have since learned that men called her the Vatican Melpomene. Rightly stood she nameless, for Melpomene she never was: never went words of hers from bronzed lyre in tragic order; never through *her* enspelled lips moaned any syllables of woe. Rather, with her leaf-twined locks, she seemed some strayed Bacchante, indissolubly filmed in secular reverie. The expression, which gave her divinity resistless, I have always suspected for an accident of the cast; since in frequent engravings of her proto-type I never met any such aspect. The secret of this indecipherable significance, I slowly discerned, lurked in the singularly diverse set of the two corners of the mouth; so that her profile wholly shifted its meaning according as it was viewed from the right or left. In one corner of her mouth the little languorous first-ling of a smile had gone to sleep; as if she had fallen a-dream, and forgotten that it was there. The other

had drooped, as of its own listless weight, into a something which guessed at sadness; guessed, but so as indolent lids are easily grieved by the pricks of the slate-blue dawn. And on the full countenance those two expressions blended to a single expression inexpressible; as if pensiveness had played the Mænad, and now her arms grew heavy under the cymbals. Thither each evening, as twilight fell, I stole to meditate and worship the baffling mysteries of her meaning : as twilight fell, and the blank noon surceased arrest upon her life, and in the vaguening countenance the eyes broke out from their day-long ambuscade. Eyes of violet blue, drowsed-amorous, which surveyed me not, but looked ever beyond, where a spell enfixed them,

Waiting for something, not for me.

And I was content. Content; for by such tenure of unnoticedness I knew that I held my privilege to worship: had she beheld me, she would have denied, have contemned my gaze. Between us, now, are years and tears: but the years waste her not, and the tears wet her not; neither misses she me or any man. There, I think, she is standing yet; there, I think, she will stand for ever: the divinity of an accident, awaiting a divine thing impossible, which can never come to her, and she knows this not.

For I reject the vain fable that the ambrosial creature is really an unspiritual compound of lime, which the gross ignorant call plaster of Paris. If Paris indeed had to do with her, it was he of Ida. And for him, perchance, she waits.

JAMES THOMSON

WHAT are the chances of the poet as against the practical man—the politician, for instance—in the game of Fame? The politician sees his name daily in the papers, until even he is a little weary of seeing it there. The poet's name appears so rarely that the sight of it has a certain thrill for its owner. But time is all on the side of the poet. The politician's name is barely given a decent burial; it makes haste to its oblivion. Where be the Chancellors of the Exchequer of yester year? The poet, on the contrary, about whom in his life people speak shyly, has his name shouted from the housetop as soon as he is out of earshot. So great, indeed, is the gratitude of reading beings, that a very little poet, such as the author of *The Seasons*, is familiarly known by name to the English-speaking race nearly two centuries after his birth; and now [1897] a new edition of his works has been issued with a memoir that does not spare a detail, and with notes—"critical appendices" they are called—that indicate a laboured study of Thomson's text.

Yet Thomson, all the time, is a poet only by courtesy —you could not find in all his formal numbers one spark of the divine fire. Pope may have helped Thomson with *The Seasons*, as Warton thinks; but between Pope and Thomson there is a vast dividing space of technical accomplishment. Between Thomson and Wordsworth or any other of the poetical poets, there is more than space, there is an impassable gulf. Yet his latest editor says "we can trace his influence, we think, in Keats; we can trace it also in Coleridge. Again,

between Wordsworth and Thomson we naturally seek affinities." Coleridge, no doubt, wrote many unreal and pretentious things about Nature—*The Hymn before Sunrise* we are bold to class among them—and these we can concede—a concession it is—to anybody to bracket with *The Seasons*. The essential Coleridge is the only Coleridge that the world of letters cares to keep; and there we must say to Thomson's editor, "Hands off." As for Wordsworth (who, by the way, preferred *The Castle of Indolence* to *The Seasons*, a preference we share), the association of Thomson's name with his has become a commonplace, and, like most commonplaces, it stands to be revised. Thomson is the link, we are constantly assured, between Milton and Wordsworth, as an observer and an interpreter of Nature. A little feeling of heart-freshness in the Spring we may, by searching, find in him—not so much in *The Seasons* as in *A Hymn*, where the phrase, "wide flush the fields," and the line:

> And every sense and every heart is joy,

just seem to be a degree less distant and conventional than was usual with the eighteenth-century Muse. But the thought is of ancient days; it is the presentment that is the essence; and three of the Spring lines in the *Intimations of Immortality* are worth many times more than all the six thousand or so lines of *The Seasons*, however indefinitely multiplied. The difference is, in truth, of kind and not of degree; and these comparisons between things which have no relativity make us feel like "young Celadon and his Amelia," when they "looked unutterable things"—the only phrase by which Thomson is likely to be spontaneously remembered.

We do not forget that the Thomson-Wordsworth

superstition had an illustrious origin—it began in Wordsworth's own saying that "from Milton to Thomson no poet had added to English literature a new image drawn from Nature." That is one of the generous *obiter dicta* great poets have made from time to time for the bewilderment of the unwary. Dr Johnson, it is true, took Thomson seriously, or wrote as though he did; but we remember that when he read *The Seasons* aloud to his friend Shiels, and extorted the listener's praise, he added, "Well, sir, I have omitted every other line." He was angry, for all that, when Lyttelton, after the poet's death, abbreviated his poem on Liberty before publishing it—such mutilations, Dr Johnson said, tended "to destroy the confidence of society and to confound the characters of authors!" Horace Walpole uttered his contempt for Thomson straight out; but Boswell was politic, as became him; and his own personal judgment is, no doubt, shrewdly pitted against Johnson's more favourable opinion in the phrase: "His *Seasons* are indeed full of elegant and pious sentiments; but a rank soil, nay, a dunghill, will produce beautiful flowers."

For and against Thomson, in seasons and out, the vain tale of opinions would take too long in the telling. But Cowper it was who said that Thomson's "lasting fame" proved him a "true poet." He would be a yet truer poet to-day, on that reasoning, for his "fame" is still lasting. His *Rule, Britannia*, has a place in anthologies even now; he is the bard in popular possession of the name he bears (a name that Praed hated [1]), although stories are told of confusion in circulating libraries and book shops between the poet of *The Seasons* and the

[1] Perhaps Francis Thompson took his Praed a little too seriously. The allusion is to that verse of Praed's, in *A Letter of*

poet of *The City of Dreadful Night*—that later James Thomson who, conscious of the identity of his name with his predecessor's, added stanzas to the *Castle of Indolence*. The secret of this sustained name—we distinguish name from fame—is easily guessed. The common mention of Milton and Wordsworth in Thomson's company supports his superfluous immortality. Poet or no poet, he is mixed up with poets, and is a part of poetical history.

And the added irony of this careful preservation of a name that stands for little or nothing is this—that whereas Thomson's naturalism was, in his own time, sufficiently marked to set his reputation going, we, with all the great poets of Nature between him and us, read him now, if we read him at all, for the very opposite quality—for artificiality. We tolerate him for his eighteenth-centuryness. We have a certain curiosity in observing an observation of Nature which was rewarded no more intimately than by a knowledge of the time-sequence of snowdrop, crocus, primrose, and "violet darkly blue." We like to hear him speak of young birds as "the feathered youth"; of his women readers as "the British fair"; of Sir Thomas More as having withstood "the brutal tyrant's useful rage." Such phrases speak to us from another world than ours, from a world which had taste that was not touched with emotion; from a world, in short, which lacked the one thing needful for poetical life—inspiration.

Advice, where one girl sends another a list of the impediments to marriage her friend must consider in view of a rumoured suitor:

> "If he ever drinks port after dinner,
> If his brow or his breeding is low,
> If he calls himself Thompson or Skinner,
> My own Araminta, say 'No!'"

THOMAS DE QUINCEY

THE life of Thomas De Quincey is too well known to need much recounting. It is, indeed, the one thing that most people do know of him, even when they have not read his works. Born at Greenhays, in the Manchester neighbourhood; brought up by a widowed mother with little in her of motherhood; shy, small, sensitive, dwelling in corners, with a passion for shunning notice, for books and the reveries stimulated by books; without the boy's love of games and external activities; the only break in his dreamy existence was the sometime companionship of a school-boy elder brother.

That episode in his childhood he has told a little long-windedly, as is the De Quincey fashion; and with curious out-of-the-way humour, as is also the De Quincey fashion. He has told of the imaginary kingdoms ruled by his brother and himself; and how the brother, assuming suzerainty over De Quincey's realm, was continually issuing proclamations which burdened the younger child's heart. Once, for example, the elder brother, having become a convert to the Monboddo doctrine in regard to Primitive Man, announced that the inhabitants of De Quincey's kingdom were still in a state of tail; and ordained that they should sit down, by edict, a certain number of hours *per diem*, to work off their ancestral appendages. Also has Thomas told of the mill-youths with whom his brother waged constant battle, impressing the little boy as an auxiliary; and how De Quincey, being captured by the adversary, was saved by the womankind of the hostile race, who

did, furthermore, kiss him all round; and how, thereupon, his brother issued a bulletin, or order of the day, censuring him in terrible language for submitting to the kisses of the enemy.

The *Confessions* contain the story of De Quincey's youth: his precocity as a Greek scholar, which led one master to remark of him: "There is a boy who could harangue an Athenian mob better than you or I an English one"; his misery at and flight from school, his subsequent drifting to London, his privations in "stony-hearted" Oxford Street, which he paced at night with the outcast Ann, and there laid the seeds of the digestive disorder which afterwards drove him to opium. His experiences as an opium-eater have become, through his *Confessions*, one of the best-known chapters in English literary history. The habit, shaken off once, returned on him, never again entirely to be mastered. But he did, after severest struggle, ultimately reduce it within a limited compass, which left free his power of work; and, unlike Coleridge, passed the closing years of his life in reasonable comfort and freedom from anxiety. The contrast was deserved. For the shy little creature displayed in his contest with the obsessing demon of his life a patient tenacity and purpose to which justice has hardly been done. With half as much 'grit,' Coleridge might have left us a less piteously wasted record. In the midst of this life-and-death struggle, De Quincey worked for his journalistic bread with an industry the results of which are represented in sixteen volumes of prose, while further gleanings have, in these late years, intermittently made their appearance. It is not a record which supports the charge of sluggishness or wasted life.

His life brought him into contact with most of the

great *littérateurs* of his time. "Christopher North" was his only bosom friend; but in his youth he was an intimate of all the "Lake" circle; and, finally, he who had known Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, Lamb, Landor, Hazlitt, and at least had glimpse of Shelley, lived to be acquainted with later men like Prof. Masson and others. Not all thought well of him: his talk, like his books, could fret as well as charm; and probably the charge of a certain spitefulness was earned. But, like feminine spite, it could be, and was, co-existent with a kind heart, a gentle and even childike nature. His children loved him; and though he was a genius, an opium-eater, and married 'beneath' him, he defied all rules by being happy in his marriage.

As a writer, De Quincey has been viewed with the complete partiality dear to the English mind, and hateful to his own. He was nothing if not distinguishing; the Englishman hates distinctions and qualifications. He loved to

> divide
> A hair 'twixt south and south-west side;

the Englishman yearns for his hair one and indivisible. The Englishman says, "Black's black—*furieusement* black; and white's white—*furieusement* white." De Quincey saw many blacks, many whites, multitudinous greys. Consequently to one he is a master of prose; to another—and that other Carlyle—"wiredrawn." To one he ranks with the Raleighs, the Brownes, the Jeremy Taylors; to another—and that other W. E. Henley—he is "Thomas de Sawdust." And, as usual, both have a measure of rightness. Too often is De Quincey wiredrawn, diffuse, ostentatious in many words of distinctions which might more summarily be put; tantalizing, exasperating. Also, if you

will suffer him with patience, he is never obvious; a challenger of routine views, a perspicuous, if minute and wordy, logician, subtle in balanced appraisal. He was the first to practise that mode of criticism we call 'appreciation'—be it a merit or not. Often his rhetorical *bravuras* (as he himself called them) are of too insistent, too clamorously artificial, a virtuosity. Also, in a valuable remainder, they are wonderful in vaporous and cloud-lifted imagination, magnificently orchestrated in structure of sentence, superb in range and quality of diction. In a more classified review, he never criticizes without casting some novel light, and often sums up the characteristics of his subject in memorably fresh and inclusive sentences. His sketch biographies, marred by characteristic discursiveness, at their best (as in the Bentley or the Shakespeare) are difficult to supersede, eating to the vitals of what they touch. His historical papers are unsystematic, skimming the subject like a sea-mew, and dipping every now and again to bring to the surface some fresh view on this or that point.

To re-tell the old has no interest for him; it is the point of controversy, the angle at which he catches a new light, that interests him. But his noble views on insulated aspects of history have sometimes been quietly adopted by succeeding writers. Thus his view of the relations between Cæsar and Pompey, and the attitude of Cicero towards both, is substantially that taken in Dean Merivale's *History of the Romans*. On his prose fantasies we have already touched. In a certain shadowy vastness of vision we say deliberately that they have more of the spirit of Milton than anything else in the language—though, of course, they have no intention of competing with Milton. They are by themselves.

The best of the *Confessions*; that vision of the starry universe which he greatly improved from Richter; parts (only parts) of *The Mail-Coach* (which is strained as a whole); portions of the *Suspiria*; above all, *The Three Ladies of Sorrow*—these are marvellous examples of a thing which no other writer, unless it be Ruskin, has succeeded in persuading us to be legitimate. Its admirers will always be few; they will always be enthusiastic.

His humour should have a word to itself. The famous *Murder as One of the Fine Arts* is the only specimen which we need pause upon. Much of that paper is humour out of date; a little childish and obvious. But of the residue let it be said that it was the first example of the topsy-turvydom which we associate with the name of Gilbert. The passage which describes how murder leads at last to procrastination and incivility—"Many a man has dated his ruin from some murder which he thought little of at the time"—might have come out of a Savoy opera. In this, as in other things, De Quincey was an innovator, and, like other innovators, has been eclipsed by his successors.

A little, wrinkly, high-foreheaded, dress-as-you-please man; a meandering, inhumanly intellectual man, shy as a hermit-crab, and as given to shifting his lodgings; much-enduring, inconceivable of way, sweet-hearted, fine-natured, small-spited, uncanny as a sprite begotten of libraries; something of a bore to many, by reason of talking like a book in coat and breeches—undeniably clever and wonderful talk none the less; master of a great, unequal, seductive, and irritating style; author of sixteen delightful and intolerable volumes, part of which can never die, and much of which can never live: that is De Quincey.

HEALTH AND HOLINESS

THIS is an age when everywhere the rights of the weaker against the stronger are being examined and asserted. Is it coincidence merely, that the protest of the body against the tyranny of the spirit is also audible and even hearkened? Within the Church itself, which has ever fostered the claims of the oppressed against the oppressor, a mild and rational appeal has made itself heard. For the body is the spouse of the spirit, and the democratic element in the complex state of man. In the very courts of the spirit the claims—might we say the rights?—of the body are being tolerantly judged.

It was not so once. The body had no rights against her husband, the spirit. One might say, she had no marital rights: she was a squaw, a hewer of wood and drawer of water for her heaven-born mate. Did she rebel, she was to be starved into submission. Was she slack in obedience, she was to be punished by the infliction of further tasks. Did she groan that things were beyond her strength, she was goaded into doing them, while the tyrannous spirit bitterly exclaimed on her slovenly performance. To overdrive a donkey was barbarous: to overdrive one's own lawful body a meritorious act. The body, in fact, was a proclaimed enemy; and as an enemy it was treated. If it began to feel but a little comfortable, high time had come to set about making it uncomfortable, or—like Oliver—it would be asking for more.

Modern science and advanced physiology must needs be felt even in the science of spirituality. Men begin

to suspect that much has been blamed to the body which should justly be laid on the mismanagement of its master. It is felt that the body has rights; nay, that the neglect of those rights may cause it to take guiltless vengeance on the soul. We may sin against the body in other ways than are catalogued in Liguori; and impoverished blood—who knows?—may mean impoverished morals. The ancients long ago held that love was a derangement of the hepatic functions. *Torrit jecur, urit jecur,* says Horace with damnable iteration; and Horace ought to know. And now, not many years ago, a distinguished Jesuit director of souls, in his letters to his penitents, has hinted, over and over again, that spiritual disease may harbour in a like vicinage.

Nay, the very conditions of modern sanctity may be said to have changed, so changed are we. There was a time—strange as it may seem, there was a time upon the earth when man flew in the face of the east wind. He did not like the east wind—his proverbs remain to tell us so; but this was merely because it gave him catarrh, or rheumatism, or inflamed throat, and such gross outward maladies. It did not dip his soul in the gloom of earthquake and eclipse; his hair, and skin, and heart were not made desiccate together. A spiritual code, which grew into being for this Man whose moral nature remained unruffled by the east wind, may surely be said to have leaked its validity before it reached *us.* He was a being of another creation. He ate, and feared not; he drank, and in all Shakespeare there is no allusion to *delirium tremens*; his schoolmaster flogged him large-heartedly, and he was almost more tickled by the joke than by the cane; he wore a rapier at his side, and stabbed or was stabbed

by his brother-man in pure good fellowship and sociable high spirits. For him the whole apparatus of virtue was constructed, a robust system fitted to a robust time. Strong, forthright minds were suited by strong, forthright direction, redounding vitality by severities of repression; the hot wine of life needed allay. But to our generation uncompromising fasts and severities of conduct are found to be piteously alien; not because, as rash censors say, we are too luxurious, but because we are too nervous, intricate, devitalized. We find our austerities ready-made. The east wind has replaced the discipline, dyspepsia the hair-shirt. Either may inflict a more sensitive agony than a lusty anchorite suffered from lashing himself to blood. It grows a vain thing for us to mortify the appetite,—would we had the appetite to mortify!—macerate an evanescing flesh, bring down a body all too untimely spent and forewearied, a body which our liberal-lived sires have transmitted to us quite effectually brought down. The pride of life is no more; to live is itself an ascetic exercise; we require spurs to being, not a snaffle to rein back the ardour of being. Man is his own mortification. Hamlet has increased and multiplied, and his seed fill the land. Would any Elsinore director have advised austerities for the Prince, or judged to the letter his self-accusings?—and to this complexion has many a one come. The very laughers ask their night-lamps

> Is all laughed in vain?

Merely to front existence, for some, is a surrender of self, a choice of ineludibly rigorous abnegation.

Grace does not cast out nature; but the way of grace is founded on nature. Sanctity is genius in religion; the Saint lives for and in religion, as the man of

genius lives for and in his peculiar attainment. Nay, it might be said that sanctity is the supreme form of genius, with the great difference that sanctity is dependent on no special privilege—or curse—of temperament. Both are the outcome of a man's inner and individual love, and are characterized by an eminent fervour, which is the note of love in action. Bearing these things in mind, it should not surprise us to find occasional parallelisms between the psychology of the Saints and the psychology of men of genius,—parallelisms which study might perhaps extend, and which are specially observable where the genius is of the poetic or artistic kind, in the broad sense of the word 'artistic.' Both Saint and Poet undergo a preparation for their work; and in both a notable feature of this preparation is a period of preliminary retirement. Even the Poets most in and of the world experience it in some form; though in their case it may be an inward process only, leaving no trace on their outward life. It is part of the mysterious law which directs all fruitful increase. The lily, about to seed, withdraws from the general gaze, and lapses into the claustral bosom of the water. Spiritual incubation obeys the same unheard command; whether it be Coleridge in his cottage at Nether Stowey, or Ignatius in his cave at Manresa. In Poet, as in Saint, this retirement is a process of pain and struggle. For it is nothing else than a gradual conformation to artistic law. He absorbs the law into himself; or rather he is himself absorbed into the law, moulded to it, until he becomes sensitively respondent to its faintest motion, as the spiritualized body to the soul. Thenceforth he needs no guidance from formal rule, having a more delicate rule within him. He is a law to himself, or indeed he is the law. In like manner does the Saint

receive into himself and become one with divine law, whereafter he no longer needs to follow where the flocks have trodden, to keep the beaten track of rule; his will has undergone the heavenly magnetization by which it points always and unalterably towards God.

In both Saint and Poet this process is followed by a rapid and bountiful development of power: in both there are throes, as it were the throes of birth. Light and darkness succeed each other like the successive waves of sun and gloom on a hillside under a brightly windy sky; but the gloom is prolonged, the light swift and intermittent. The despairing chasms of agony into which the Saints are plunged have their analogy in the paroxysms of loss and grief related by Chateaubriand, Berlioz, and others. How far these things are conditioned by the body in the case of the Poet is obscure. If the uniform nature, in them all, of these emotional crises points to a psychic origin, it is none the less difficult to avoid the suspicion, the probable suspicion, that physical reaction is an accessory cause. In the case of the Saint, shall we hold the body always guiltless? Did those passionate austerities of the Manresa cavern (for one typical instance) leave the body hale and sane? Had we to reckon solely with the natural order, the answer would not be doubtful; and, since sanctity has never asserted itself an antidote against the consequences of indiscreet actions, I know not why one should shrink from drawing the likely conclusion and adventuring the likely hypothesis. That celestial unwisdom of fast, vigil, and corporal chastening must, it is like, have exposed Ignatius to the reactions of the weakened body. Fast is the diet of angels, said St Athanasius; and Milton echoed him:

> Spare Fast, that oft with gods doth diet.

But when mortals surfeit on that food, and superadd stripes and night-watchings, the forespent body is prone to strange revenges. In some measure, is it not possible such may have mingled with the experiences and temptations of Ignatius? The reality of these ghostly conflicts there is not need to doubt; I do not doubt. But with them who shall say what may have been the intermixture of subjective symptoms, fumes of the devitalized flesh? When, the agony past, the battle won, the wedlock with divine law achieved, Ignatius emerged from the cave to carry his hard-won spiritual arms against the world, he saw coiled round a wayside cross a green serpent. Was this indeed an apparition, to be esteemed beside the heavenly monitions of the cavern, or rather such stuff as Macbeth's air-drawn dagger, the issue of an overwrought brain? I recall a poet,[1] passing through that process of seclusion and interior gestation already considered. In his case the psychological manifestations were undoubtedly associated with disorder of the body. In solitude he underwent profound sadness and suffered brief exultations of power: the wild miseries of a Berlioz gave place to accesses of half-pained delight. On a day when the skirts of a prolonged darkness were drawing off from him, he walked the garden, inhaling the keenly languorous relief of mental and bodily convalescence; the nerves sensitized by suffering. Pausing in reverie before an arum, he suddenly was aware of a minute white-stoled child sitting on the lily. For a second he viewed her with surprised delight, but no wonder; then, returning to consciousness, he recognized the hallucination almost in the instant of her vanishing. The apparition had no connexion with his reverie; and

[1] Francis Thompson himself.

though not perhaps so strongly visual as to deceive an alert mind, suggests the possibility of such deception. Furthermore, one notes that the green serpent of St Ignatius, unlike the divine monitions in the cave, unlike the visions in general of the saints, was apparently purposeless: it had no function of warning, counsel, temptation, or trial. Yet repetitions of the experience in the Saint's after life make it rash, despite all this, to decide what is not capable of decision, and to say that it may have been a trick of fine-worn nerves.

There is at any rate a possibility that, even in the higher ascetic life, the means used to remove the stumbling-block of the body may get up in it a fresh stumbling-block, to a certain degree; that, even here, Brother Ass may take his stubborn retaliation; and this is a possibility of which our ancestors had no dream. St Ignatius himself came to think that he had done penance not wisely but too well at Manresa; nevertheless it was only the after-effects at which he glanced, the impairing of his physical utility in later years. With modern lack of constitution the possibility is increased. No spread of knowledge can efface asceticism; but we may, perhaps, wear our asceticism with a difference.

And in some sort there was more hope with the old body than with this new one. When the energies of the old body were once yoked to the chariot-pole of God, they went fast. But what shall be made of a body whose energies lie down in the road? When to these things is added the crowning vice and familiar accompaniment of weakness—selfishness, it is clear indeed that we require an asceticism; but not so clear that the asceticism we require is the old asceticism. Can this inertia of the modern body be met by breaking still

further the beast already over-feeble for its load? It is not possible. In those old valiant days, when the physical frame waxed fat and kicked, the most ardent saints ended in the confession of a certain remorse for their tyrannous usage of the accursed flesh. St Ignatius, we have said, came to think he had needlessly crippled his body—after all, a necessary servant—by the unweighed severity of Manresa. Even the merciless Assisian—merciless towards himself, as tender towards all others—confessed on the deathbed of his slave-driven body: "I have been too hard on Brother Ass."

Yes, Brother Ass, poor Brother Ass, had been inhumanly ridden; and but for his stubborn constitution would have gone nigh to hamper the sanctity he could not prevent. In these days he is a weak beast, and may not stand a tithe of the burdens a Francis of Assisi piled upon him with scarce more than a responsive groan. Chastening he needs: he will not sustain overmuch chastisement. How shall asceticism address itself to this etiolated body of death? For all that I have said regards only the externals of asceticism. Asceticism in its essence is always and inevitably the same. The weak, dastardly, and selfish body of to-day needs an asceticism—never more. The task before religion is to persuade and constrain the body to take up its load. It demands great tenderness and great firmness, as with a child. The child is led by love, and swayed by authority. It must feel the love behind the inflexible will; the will always firm behind the love. And to-day, as never before, one must *love* the body, must be gently patient with it:

> Daintied o'er with dear devices,
> Which He loveth, for He grew.

The whole scheme of history displays the body as "Creation's and Creator's crowning good." The aim of all sanctity is the redemption of the body. The consummation of celestial felicity is reunion with the body. All is for the body; and holiness, asceticism itself, rest (next to love of God) on love of the body. As love, in modern Christianity, is increasingly come to be substituted for the motive-power of fear, may it not be that love of the body should increasingly replace hatred of the body as the motive even of asceticism? We need (as it were) to show a dismayed and trembling body, shrinking from the enormity of the world, that all, even rigour and suppression, is done in care for it. The incumbency of daily duty, the constant frets of the world and social intercourse, the intermittent friction of that ruined health which is to most of us the legacy from our hard-living ancestors, the steady mortification of our constitutional sloths and vanities—may not these things make in themselves a handsome asceticism, less heroic, but not less effectual, than the showy austerities of our forefathers? A wise director, indeed, said, "No." Such external and unsought mortifications came to be borne as an habitual matter—grudged but accepted, like the gout or some pretty persistent ailment. The observation may be shrewdly right; but I confess I doubt it. The accumulated burthen of these things seems to me to exact a weary and daily—nay, hourly fresh intention. If, however, voluntary inflictions be necessary to subdue this all-too-subdued body, they should not be far to seek without heroic macerations which very surely our stumbling Brother Ass cannot support.

The energy of the saints has left everywhere its dents upon the world. When these men, reviled for

impotence, have turned their half-disdainful hand to tasks approved by the multitude, they have borne away the palm from the world in its now prized exercises. Take, if you will, poetry. In the facile forefront of lyric sublimity stand the Hebrew prophets: not only unapproached, but the exemplars to which the greatest endeavour after approach. The highest praise of Milton, Dante, supreme names of Christian secular song, is to have captured spacious echoes of these giants' solitary song. In so far, then, and from one of their aspects, these great poets are derivative; and could not so have written without their sacred models. Yet the Hebrew prophets wrote without design of adding to the world's poetry, without purpose of poetic fame, intent only on their message (unblessed word, yet "an excellent good word till it was ill-sorted"): they thought only of the kingdom of God, and "all these things were added unto them"! Or consider, in another field of human endeavour, St Augustine. Throughout his brilliant youth he was simply a rhetorician of his day; a dazzling rhetorician, a noted rhetorician, but he produced nothing of permanence, and might have passed from the ken of posterity as completely as the many noted rhetoricians who were his contemporaries. He rose to literary majesty and an authentic immortality only when he rose to sanctity. Yet those works which still defy time were the by-product of an active episcopal life, a life of affairs which would have soaked in the energies of most men. With like incidentalness Francis of Assisi sang his *Hymn to the Sun*, that other Francis—of Sales—wrote his delightful French prose, John of the Cross poured out those mystical poems which are among the treasurable things of Spanish literature, and unforgotten prose

works besides; all in the leisure hours of lives which had no leisure hours, lives which to most men would have been death.

For holiness not merely energizes, not merely quickens; one might almost say it prolongs life. By its Divine reinforcement of the will and the energies, it wrings from the body the uttermost drop of service; so that, if it can postpone dissolution, it averts age, it secures vital vigour to the last. It prolongs that life of the faculties, without which age is the foreshadow of the coming eclipse. These men, in whom is the indwelling of the Author of life, scarce know the meaning of decrepitude: they are constantly familiar with the suffering, but not the palsy, of mortality. In all these men you witness the same striking spectacle; in all these men, nay, and in all these women. Sex and fragility matter not; these flames burn till the candle is consumed utterly. "We are always young," said the Egyptian priests to the Greek emissaries; and the Saints might repeat the boast, did they not disdain boasting. It was on the instinctive knowledge of this, on the generous confidence they might trust the Creator with His creation, that the Saints based the stern handling of the body which some of them afterwards allowed to have been excessive. For though the oil can immensely energize and prolong the life of the wick, it is on that corporeal wick, after all, that the flame of active energy depends. The fire is conditioned by the fleshly fuel. No energy can replace the substance of energy; and while some impoverishment is a necessity of ascetic preparation, waste is a costly waste. For, even as a beast of burthen, this sore-spent body is a Golden Ass.

But with all tender and wise allowance (and in these

pages I have not been slack of allowance) it remains as it was said: " He that loseth his life for Me shall find it." The remedy for modern lassitude of body, for modern weakness of will, is Holiness. There alone is the energizing principle from which the modern world persists in divorcing itself. If " this body of death " be, in ways of hitherto undreamed subtlety, a clog upon the spirit, it is no less true that the spirit can lift up the body. In the knowledge of the body's endless interplay with the spirit, of the subtle inter-relations between this father and daughter, this husband and wife, this pair whose bond is at once filial and marital, we have grown paralysingly learned in late days. But our knowledge is paralysing because it is one-sided. Of the body's reactions and command upon the spirit we know far indeed from all, yet fearfully much. Of the potency, magisterial, benevolent, even tyrannous, which goes forth from the spirit upon the body we have but young knowledge. Nevertheless it is in rapid act of blossoming. Hypnotism, faith-healing, radium—all these, of such seeming multiple divergence, are really concentrating their rays upon a common centre. When that centre is at length divined, we shall have scientific witness, demonstrated certification, to the commerce between body and spirit, the regality of will over matter. To the blind tyranny of flesh upon spirit will then visibly be opposed the serene and sapient awe of spirit upon flesh. Then will lie open the truth which now we can merely point to by plausibilities and fortify by instance: that Sanctity is medicinal, Holiness a healer, from Virtue goes out virtue, in the love of God is more than solely ethical sanity. For the feebleness of a world seeking some maternal hand to which it may cling a wise asceticism is remedial.

Health, I have well-nigh said, is Holiness. What if Holiness be Health? Two sides of one truth. In their co-ordination and embrace resides the rounded answer. It is that embrace of body and spirit, Seen and Unseen, to which mortality, sagging but pertinacious, unalterably tends.

ROBERT BROWNING

FEW things in the study of a great artist's growth appear to us more fascinating than the endeavour to trace in the boy the secret roots of the man; and few literary pleasures are rarer. It is this which lends such unique interest to the early autobiography of a man like De Quincey, with a memory whose enormous range penetrated even the dim *nebulæ* of childhood; and this will make the reader turn with special interest in William Sharp's brief biography of Robert Browning to the details of his early years. His ancestry appears to have been singularly mixed; English, Scotch, Creole, and German blood flowed in his veins. His father was a man of general cultivation; a scholar, an amateur of art, and a good amateur draughtsman. Mr Sharp calls him also a poet—a levity in the use of the term we should not have expected from a poet. As a matter of fact, the elder Browning appears to have been a polished and accomplished versifier after the school of Pope. Two traits in him are justly considered significant in their bearing on his son's after-work. He had an "extraordinary analytical faculty in the elucidation of complex criminal cases," and his son said of him that "he was completely versed in mediæval legend, and seemed to have known Paracelsus, Faustus, and even Talmudic personages, personally." The poet's mother had a passion for music, and some taste for poetry—not of Pope's, but the Romantic, school. Clearly, therefore, Browning's home influences were artistic to a degree which is rarely enjoyed by a singer in bud, and which usually results in early development.

A child whose father used to sing him to sleep with snatches of Anacreon might well be expected, like Pope or Rossetti,[1] to prove precocious; and precocious he proved. Mr Sharp, indeed, says that "hundreds of youngsters have written as good, or better, *Odes to the Moon*, *Stanzas on a Favourite Canary*, *Lines on a Butterfly*"; but we understand Browning to have been only eight at the time of these compositions. About the same period he was translating the simpler odes of Horace, and his next exploit was precocious enough, in all conscience, to astonish either a biographer or a father. At ten he fell violently in love. "A trifle of fifteen years seniority," (says Mr Sharp) "and a husband, complicated matters; but it was not till after the reckless expenditure of a Horatian ode upon an unclassical mistress that he gave up hope." The outcome of this was what the elder Browning regarded as a startling effusion of much Byronic verse. The young Robert yearned for wastes of ocean and illimitable sands, for dark eyes and burning caresses, for despair that nothing could quench but the silent grave, and, in particular, for "hollow-mocking laughter." After which it is not surprising that he was sent to school.

Very characteristic is it in the future author of *Men and Women* that here his chosen spot for dreams was one where, in the sequestered shadow of three great elms, he could look over upon London. "There," says Mr Sharp, "he would lie for hours looking upon distant London—a golden city of the west literally enough, oftentimes, when the sunlight came streaming

[1] Rossetti's *juvenilia*, it is true, were not remarkable. But if he indeed wrote the *Blessed Damozel* at nineteen, it is the most surprising achievement accomplished by an English poet of those years.

in long shafts from behind the towers of Westminster, and flashed upon the gold cross of St Paul's. The coming and going of the cloud-shadows, the sweeping of sudden rains, the dull silvern light emanating from the haze of mist shrouding the vast city, with the added transitory gleam of troubled waters, the drifting of fogs, at that distance seeming like gigantic veils constantly being moved forward and then slowly withdrawn, as though some sinister creature of the atmosphere were casting a net among all the dross and *débris* of human life for fantastic sustenance of its own—all this endless, ever-changing, always novel phantasmagoria had for him an extraordinary fascination." And one of the memorable occasions of his boyhood was his first view, from the same place, of London by night.

If his initial attempts to express himself were moulded by the inevitable Byron, from a second-hand bookstall fell the spark of "right Promethean fire" into his soul. There he picked up the pirated *Queen Mab*. Alas, the palmy day of the second-hand bookstall is past when it yielded to the literary gold-digger *Queen Mabs* or *Omar Khayyáms*; you never find now in that Limbus Patrum any good poets waiting resurrection. Can it be that all the good poets nowadays go straight to the heaven of recognition without waiting? Not so then, at any rate. All that Browning could learn about his new love, was that he had written many poems and was dead. The boy begged his mother to procure him Shelley's complete works; and Mr Ollier, at whose shop alone she could obtain them, persuaded her to include three volumes of Keats in her purchase. That night, we need no fancy to conceive, Browning must have entered into Paradise. "He told a friend it was a May night, and that in a laburnum, heavy with its

weight of gold, and in a great copper-beech at the end of a neighbour's garden, two nightingales strove one against the other." The influence of Shelley, strongly marked in *Pauline* and often visible in *Paracelsus*, displays itself especially in a passion for Nature which faded from his maturer work; and accordingly it is instructive to note that much of *Paracelsus* and several scenes of *Strafford* were conceived first in a wood near Dulwich where he used to walk at midnight. "About this time, too, he composed much in the open air. This he rarely, if ever, did in later life"—a clear connexion between cause and effect. Had his Nature-impulse been a part of himself, instead of an emanation from Shelley, he could no more have composed *out* of the open air than could Shelley or Wordsworth. The mere shaping of his poetry he might have done at times under a roof-tree, but his inspiration would have come to him from the free cope of heaven. The thought on which *Pippa Passes* is based occurred to him in this same Dulwich Wood—a fact which interests us, because we had thought it probable that the idea was drawn from his reading the *Gesta Romanorum*, where a monk takes very much the place assigned by the poet to the little silk weaver.

Mr Sharp's is that sympathetic criticism (the best and safest in dealing with contemporary or approximately contemporary literature) which Mr Coventry Patmore recently assailed, and Mr Courthope cavils at. This method, which endeavours to interpret by sympathetic insight a writer's aims, and estimate the success with which he has accomplished them, Mr Courthope styles the appreciative method, and, acknowledging value in it, says nevertheless, in effect, that it tends to lead the critic astray, and is not judgment. He would have an

author tried by principles derived from the practice of the great past writers. The two methods are not altogether mutually exclusive; the best sympathetic critics will always use the past, though cautiously, as a corrective to their individual perceptions. But, taking the two in broad opposition, we reply simply that the method advocated by Mr Courthope is rankly unfair. It is precisely the application to new aims, involving new methods, of principles drawn from former methods adjusted to former aims, which has caused some of the most disgraceful injustices in the history of criticism. It was the application to the Elizabethan dramatists of principles based on the practice of the classical dramatists which has made much eighteenth-century criticism a by-word to posterity. If we could extract from the study of present literature a codified criticism which should give us principles by which to measure present productions, such were the most excellent thing to do. But we can no more do it than we can write calm, philosophical, contemporary history. This codification is always effected by the ampler vision of posterity, whose laws show fewer details but give a larger field. And by the time it is effected it serves principally to show *why* artists were right whom general criticism has long stamped as right without knowing the law of their rightness. One method, therefore, is unfair, another is impossible: there remains only, for contemporary work, the method of delicate sympathy. And our best critics adopt it, not because it is the soundest of conceivable ways, but because it is the least unsound of practicable ways. It is susceptible of errors, but it minimizes injustice.

Mr Sharp, accordingly, judges Browning as far as possible from the standpoint created by himself. And

the resulting conclusions are, we think, mainly sound and discriminating. In *In a Balcony* says Norbert, the man of action:

> We live, and they experiment on life—
> Those poets, painters, all who stand aloof
> To overlook the farther.

That Norbert should so describe the poet is dramatically characteristic, and is still more characteristic of Norbert's creator. For the description does not fit one poet in fifty; but it largely fits Shakespeare, and it exactly fits Browning. He is an experimenter on life, more impersonal than Shakespeare's self, and far more cool-headedly impartial. If Browning had written *Coriolanus*, the Tribunes would have been not half bad fellows. It is characteristic, therefore, that he should assume this as the typical poet's attitude, for he not only preserved it himself, but threw quite unnecessary scorn on the opposite attitude:

> "Unlock my heart with a sonnet-key?"
> No; thanking the public, I must decline.
> A peep through my window, if folks prefer;
> But please you, no foot over threshold of mine!
> "Hoity toity! A street to explore,
> "Your house the exception! 'With this same key
> "'*Shakespeare unlocked his heart*,' once more!"
> Did Shakespeare? If so, the less Shakespeare he!

To justify his own way, he needed not to have thus attacked the other way. But he assails it yet more contemptuously in *At the Mermaid*, to which he prefixes the motto:

> The figure that thou here seest . . . Tut!
> Was it for gentle Shakespeare put?

Yes; but though "Shakespeare" is carved on the

pedestal, the face is the face of Browning. And the figure which he chooses to set over against himself, as typical of the heart-unlocking poets, is—it can be meant for no one else—Byron; who never showed what he called his heart to a human being, without first carefully arranging the draperies about it and adjusting the light. What if one had replied: "No; Byron knew too well the putrid secrets of his heart to suffer within it visiting eyes; but if ever a poet has uncurtained to public day the shy sanctities of a heart, she who did that gracious courtesy to poetry was your wife. Here are stones to cast at her of your own hewing, let us cast them as you have taught us."

But Browning's mind, though dramatic, is so in a peculiar way. He is dramatic in the sense that he loves dramatic situation, interplay, and characterization; he is undramatic in the sense that he loves a mental analysis whose most usual vehicle would be relation. To gratify both loves, he combines them. The result is a thing—not drama in the accepted sense of drama—which needs a new basis; and this he finds in a gigantic convention, viz., an extension of the principle of the soliloquy. The Shakespearean soliloquy is itself a convention (based on the not very common trick of thinking aloud) for extending the dramatist's powers by enabling him occasionally to show, like the novelist, what passes in his character's secret mind. Now, as the stage soliloquy is an extension of thinking aloud, so Browning's practice is an extension of the stage soliloquy. He carries the principle of the soliloquy into the dialogue. He makes his characters utter to each other not only what would naturally arise to their lips under the given circumstances, but also thoughts and feelings of which, in actual life, they would not advertently

be conscious, which only upon subsequent leisurely reflection would they recognize themselves to have entertained. How essentially this is a part of his genius may be gathered from *In a Balcony*, which, although for the greater part of its course (except that action is lacking) it moves upon the lines of ordinary drama, nevertheless cannot avoid occasionally straying into Browning's wonted method. Refer to the passage where Constance, after discovering the Queen's error, at length wholly throws herself into Norbert's arms. Did ever lovers, *could* ever lovers, in such a moment analyse themselves and the situation as do these twain ? So they might feel; so, in the instant of feeling, they never could explain that they felt. What a contrast with the intensely natural passion of the close, with Constance's stifled iteration, "Yours! Yours! Yours!" and again, "Found, found!" This is kindred art to his who drew the weeping Cordelia—"No cause, no cause!"

The lack of individualization in some of Browning's characters—Norbert and Constance, for example—disappears mainly when his personages are tinged, if not possessed, by the more violent or baser passions, or when they present some scarce idiosyncrasy. For there is a close analogy between his tastes in reading and in creation. His love for curious booklore is precisely equivalent to his love for curious characterlore. He is a psychological collector, and with the true collector's spirit often (somewhat regrettably often) prefers rarity to beauty. The shorter, however, as compared with the lengthier poems, give a larger proportionate place to the softer elements in song; and would yield a collection of winning poems which might surprise those who judge Browning solely by his dominant moods. Not Rossetti could have dipped his brush in

words to more golden purpose than is done in that true painter's poem, *A Face*. The gentler qualities are salient throughout *James Lee's Wife*; which exemplifies, moreover, a further advantage of the lesser pieces, in that they yield a greater number of sustainedly artistic wholes. Allowing for the underlying convention necessary to Browning's analytic method, *James Lee's Wife* is as artistic a whole as it is searching in the refinements of its mental phases. Only very casually do we find in it a dramatic thoughtlessness such as the little section *Among the Rocks*, beginning,

> Oh, good gigantic smile o' the brown old earth.

A fine Shakespeareanly virile bit of poetry: but are the big thews of it, both in fancy and expression, appropriate to a woman? Not even to the "large utterance" of imperial Egypt, or the majestic mouth of Hermione would Shakespeare have ascribed such a speech. Finally, in these miscellaneous pieces we get now and again the personal note which Browning deprecated; and which Nemesis ordains should often go straightest to the reader's heart. The noble *Rabbi Ben Ezra* is pure Browning. On the whole, from the minor poems, taken in their entirety, is to be gained the best idea of Browning's grasp. So judged, he will be found a poet as striking in the range as in the strength and subtlety of his power. He is not like Tennyson, versatile. But seldom, perhaps, is versatility associated with the highest manifestations of genius; for range is not to be confounded with versatility. The most tremendous range in all poetry is that magically pavilioned under Shakespeare's mind; yet few poets have been less versatile than Shakespeare.

Mr Sharp dismisses rather too scornfully, as some

will think, the charge that Browning is obscure. In regard to another disputed matter—the poet's metre—Mr Sharp's judgement is true and discriminating. Much of the attack here comes from those who favour only the "Dorian mood of flutes and soft recorders," not the music of "sonorous metal blowing martial sounds," and who would cast out of all orchestras

> The golden trombone, that darteth its tongue
> Like a bee of the gods.

Speaking generally (where we should like to speak minutely), roughness of metre is not only excusable, but a merit, (1) when it is required in order to harmonize with the sense, (2) in poems of some length, to relieve monotony and afford contrast. Browning (often harsh, even in his lyrics) usually shows at his best in the sedater and more deliberate rhythms which better suit his temperament, such as blank verse, or the numbers of *Rabbi Ben Ezra*. This last, indeed, was a felicitous choice; and we often wonder why a form so noble is so seldom used. The curt, marching trample of the trimeters, interspersed with the long, drum-like roll of the heroic or the alexandrine, completes a singularly majestic metre, whose measured beat and weight of emphasis are precisely suited to Browning's massive style.

Yet Mr Sharp, like many of Browning's admirers, is, perhaps, apt to be a little too apologetic for the poet's manly ruggednesses, not his prosaic crabbedness of dialectic, but those other ruggednesses which are merely the swollen muscles on the arms of the athlete. To be strong in Shakespeare's day took not half the strength which it takes to be strong in our day. For part of man's native strength is absorbed in the assertion of himself against the opposite tendency of his time. Milo could

carry the ox; he could not rive the oak. Therefore, when a poet triumphs, as Browning, over that almost irresistible resilience of the surrounding spirit, when his hands are not wedged in the century, he reveals an innate originality. Browning we can trace to no ancestors. Once the first warm impulse from Shelley glows out in *Paracelsus*, he stands forth as an underivable personality, fostered by Shelley's sun, but how generated we know not; in some sense, perhaps, more brusquely isolated than Shakespeare's self, whose vaster comprehensiveness necessarily gave him more frontiers. So intensely vital a personality must needs compel attention even from those in whom it moves repulsion. Of no man better than of Browning could we use the Latin euphemism for death. *Vixit.* To whatever ultimate results, he has lived indeed.[1]

[1] It is pertinent to recall that in one of Browning's last letters, written from Asolo in October 1889, the year of his death, to a friend of his own and of Thompson, he says of some of Thompson's early work: "Both the Verse and Prose are indeed remarkable. Pray assure him, if he cares to know it, that I have a confident expectation of his success," an expectation realized four years later, when Thompson's first volume of poems appeared.

WILLIAM ERNEST HENLEY

IN Mr W. E. Henley has passed away [July 1903] a brilliant man of letters, a distinguished poet and essayist, who never gained his due recognition from the dormant many, while by the intellectual flower of young England, so much of which passed under his personal influence and control, he was worshipped the other side of idolatry. To all these, to those who clustered round the defiant banner of *The National Observer*, and to most young minds for whom literature mattered exceedingly, Henley was the Viking chief of letters, whom all delighted to follow, whose example set the mark for rejoicing emulation. Whether he were greater in prose or verse it would go hard to say: though one may surely foretell that the perdurable quality of poetry will in the end take revenge for its tardier instant appeal. Yet, because brilliant English and brilliant critical impressionism do make some swift appeal to all with any lettered sense, we may consider first the prose of this man with the rare dual gift. Whichever way you take him, the genius is unmistakable. Critical appreciation resides in attempting to discover what your author has aimed to compass; and then setting forth the impression yourself retain of his success or failure to succeed in the elected aim. It is obvious that your achievement will be very much in the ratio of your sympathetic gift; as that is limited your achievement will be limited, as that is comprehensive your achievement will be comprehensive, as that is subtle or delicate your achievement will be subtle or delicate. Now Henley's sympathy is a thing very far from compre-

hensive; yet it were merely unjust to call it narrow. It is wide, and heartily wide, but defective—curiously, unexpectedly, perversely defective. It is comparable to the Scottish coast; an ample coast-line, yet jaggedly broken, abruptly and bafflingly discontinuous—in the racy Shakespearean phrase, *nook-shotten*—which juts forth innumerable bold projections, and is breached as brusquely with countless ragged fissures. The projections are the keen saliences of Henley's righteous perception; the fissures, the startling rifts and unforeseeable lapses in that perception. When he has carried you off your feet with his inevitable rightness, he is most like to stagger you back to them by his wilful and confident wrongness. For like Ruskin, to whom he is the antithesis, he is always certain, and never more certain than when he is most unsafe. But you cannot remain indifferent before this meteoric reviewer.

And that comes not alone of his mental vigour and individuality, but of his marvellous style. It is a style artificial, after its kind, as that of the Goliath of the Philistines, Macaulay; yet so pulsating with energy that want of nature is the last thing you have breath to think of. A world of cultured study has gone to the forging of the weapon; bickering with epigram and antithesis, glittering with the elaborate research of phrase which betokens his poetic discipline, poised shapen in its sentences with the artful and artistic hand of a consummate master; yet the fire, the off-hand virility of the man enable him to wield it with all the ease and nature imaginable.

With such character, and such executive power to manifest it, he is naturally best where he is most one at heart with the man he criticizes. Out of the various

and cosmopolitan critiques in *Views and Reviews* one would pick as triumphant and magisterial Henley such things as the Labiche, Rabelais, Berlioz, Hugo, Meredith, and Disraeli. Perhaps specially the last three: they have all the very qualities and defects which might endear them to Henley. Disraeli, for instance. The unconventional Tory appeals to the unconventional Tory; the master of antithesis, epigram, and paradox to a master of epigram, paradox, and antithesis; the brilliant unrest of the one to the brilliant unrest of the other; the statesman's intolerant scorn of commonplace to the writer's intolerant scorn of commonplace; even the masterful egoism of Disraeli to a certain masterful egoism in Henley. You would expect a victorious 'critique,' and you have a victorious critique. There are no *lacunæ* in judgment; the reviewer is with his subject to the marrow; and you have the very Henley at his best. Flashing insight, keen unravelling of vices from merits, language rejoicing in its own point, purity, and ebullience of resourceful strength. Elsewhere you stumble over fads, blindnesses, wilful crotchets. In such essays as we have named, you are left to unhindered enjoyment and wonder.

As a poet, Henley falls into two chief periods. He gained fame with *A Book of Verses*, and mostly with two sections of it; the "Hospital" poems, because nothing like them had been known in English, the "Bric-à-Brac," because very much like them was known in English. The latter fell in with a dominant fashion, the imitation of the artificial forms of old French verse; the former set a fashion. The "Hospital" poems, in a style drawn from French exemplars, had the immediate success of novelty in addition to that

justly earned by the power of the verse itself. With a leaven of sonnets, these poems are in rhymeless lyric metres of various shapes, fashioned with cunning originality, for their peculiar function and peculiar content. Often but slightly more than squared and measured-off prose in their movement, they fit exactly the realism of the style, which admits a larger infusion of everyday and colloquial idioms or diction than poetry had ventured on before. The marrow of poetry is subtly preserved by the exceeding fitness and closeness of phrase, the intimacy of emotion; while the expression rises at need into the higher reaches of poetry.

The marvellous sonnet descriptive of Stevenson is really as much matter of perfect form and phrase as the Bric-à-Brac poems, which are avowed exercises in the most artificial kinds of form. Hence it is not surprising that Henley's success in these is perfect as in the rugged realism of the Hospital section. They are handled with a deftness which naturalizes this alien and unnatural form as few of its English devotees have succeeded in doing. The *Ballade of a Toyokuni Colour-print* with its refrain, " I loved you once in old Japan " —that, or the *Double Ballade of Life and Fate*—as sprightly and charming a dance of words as may be penned in its gay trifling—show what a master of verse at play was the stern poet of " In Hospital," with its manner and metres grim, bare, and saturnine in severe structuralness as the Hospital itself.

Scattered through this volume were strains of a higher mood, suggesting a more inward poetry than the rest. But as a whole, this first book showed Henley as a poet after the Gallic fashion, which (at least till very recently, and regarding the general type of the national genius) is, like that of the Greeks, rather an artistic than

a poetic fashion of song. The French poetic genius has always depended for excellence on formal and structural perfection, has been a chiselled and carven thing. The same reliance on a severely architectural perfection marked the Greek poetry: so that Heine said there was more *poetry* in Shakespeare than in all the Greek poets together, except Aristophanes. English poetry, on the contrary, is the ideal of a poetry completely distinguished from art, depending on an inward and indescribable spirit which perhaps we may call the romantic spirit. Henley's first book belonged to artistic and Gallic poetry, an objective thing, a thing of form and carving. But the *London Voluntaries* showed him as an absolutely English poet. He had attained a far higher poetry, full of the romantic spirit, which animated and formed the form instead of depending on it. They are in so-called irregular lyric metre, ebbing and flowing with the emotion itself. Irregular it is not, though the law is concealed. Only a most delicate response to the behests of inspiration can make such verse successful. As some persons have an instinctive sense of orientation by which they always know the quarter of the East, so the poet with this gift has a subtle sense of hidden metrical law, and in his most seeming-vagrant metre revolves always (so to speak) round a felt though invisible centre of obedience. Henley has the sense fully. In these Voluntaries a rich and lovely verbal magic is mated with metre that comes and goes like the heaving of the Muse's bosom—

> The ancient River singing as he goes,
> New-mailed in morning, to the ancient Sea.

Or again:

> The night goes out like an ill-parcelled fire,
> And, as one lights a candle, it is day.

Henley's sense of words, and gift of conveying the inmost feeling of a scene, is in these poems supreme. And what shall one say of *The Song of the Sword*, which rings like the cry of the Viking Raven fluttering her wings for battle? What of little lyrics like *You played and sang a Snatch of Song?* If his leading trait is a ragged strength and faithfulness to the thing seen or known, such as looks from his bust by Rodin, he has also the capacity for sudden intimacies of beauty or feeling which is the birthright of strength.

HENLEY'S BYRON AND BURNS

BYRON, having fallen, as Henley would consider, on evil days, has gone long without an editor—since, indeed, the edition published by Murray in 1837. Whatever be our opinions of Byron, it was undoubtedly high time for a new edition of one of the most striking personalities in English letters; and W. E. Henley now [1896] gives us the first volume of what bids fair to be the most erudite edition of Byron. The present volume is confined to the "noble poet's" letters, so that we are not called upon to deal with Byron as poet—a subject on which we might be forced to the emprise perilous of breaking a lance with the editor. For Henley, as no reader of his brilliant prose needs to be told, is of them that worship Byron. We are, alas! infidel, atheistic, of the house of the scorner. But Byron the letter-writer is another matter. Of these dashing letters there can be but one opinion. They begin in Byron the juvenile—*Hours of Idleness* Byron. *Hours of Idleness* Byron is a conceited, affected young puppy, with a fancy for feminine italics. No one would read in him the youthful Byron of Miss Pigot's sketch: a shy, fat boy, throwing off his shyness after a piece of school-girl badinage. And yet that sketch is linked with them; for even thus early we find Byron's lifelong bugbear—the dread of being "more fat than bard beseems." For the rest, we see him conscientiously aiming at smartness; and, as letters roll on, what was at first a manifest thing of malice prepense becomes a habit which is second nature —indeed, no doubt originally based on first nature—

and it would be unjust to regard the smartness of the letters as a thing maintained by perpetual self-conscious effort. Never dull, always full of snap and dash; natural—in so far as they represent a nature always *poseur*; manly—or at least man-of-the-worldly; they are not the letters of Byron the poet, they are the letters of "Lord George, the young man about town"—to quote Moore. There is a tincture of literary 'shop,' but we should lie deadly if we called it literature.

But that Byron as a letter-writer is excellent, imperishable, and *sui generis* we cordially acknowledge; with that off-hand, devil-may-care, carefully careless manner, so constitutionally affected as to be unaffected. No man of Byron's age wrote in his shirt-sleeves, nor would have been so excellent if he had. Letter-writing was an accomplishment; the infrequency of letters made it so. Very admirable are the letters from abroad during his first travels. It is curious to observe the insistence with which he returns, in letter after letter to the same and diverse correspondents, to a couple of personal facts—that he swam the Hellespont, and that Ali Pasha said he *must* be a man of high birth, because he had little hands and ears. Other letters mirror the fashionable life of London as no other man had power to do. Drinking, scandal-mongering, making love, providing material for a hundred divorce suits had the day been ours—there you have them, an unedifying, heathen, hard-bitten set.

The Notes provide simply a complete series of little biographies of every one mentioned in the letters; miniature biographies with such vital selection, such concise completion without dryasdustness, such interest,

in little, as no other writer but Henley could compass. It may fairly be said that he has discovered a new art, the art of biographic cameos. We might say, after Sheridan: "Egad, the interpreter talks the better of the two"; for we are not sure but the Notes are the most absorbing part of the book. But, at any rate, it is safe to say that henceforth the typical edition of Byron can never be separated from these Notes; for annotator, like author, is alive to the finger-tips. It was said of Kean that to watch him act was like seeing Shakespeare by flashes of lightning. It might equally be said of these Notes that it is like reading biography by flashes of lightning. One after another they pass before us: the men with whom Byron drank, dined, and laughed—men like Moore, Rogers, Hobhouse, Davies, Clare; the women to whom he made love—Lady Caroline Lamb the reckless, Lady Oxford the amiable; the pugilists he watched or boxed with—Belcher, Gentleman Jackson, the classic of form, the refined of manners, famous by battles fit and few; the Murray with whom he published, the Cider Cellar where he was fashionably rowdy.

Loving Byron, Henley will love Byron's dog. Now there were two poets of the day even more artificial and insincere than Byron himself; wherefore Byron took them to his (strictly figurative) heart. The world has chosen to cast them out of its mouth; but Henley will be in charity with them to the furthest of his conscience, or mayhap a little further. Therefore Rogers, he tells us, may still be read with pleasure. To which it seems enough to answer that Rogers is not read at all, nor like to be read. Therefore, again, Moore is a master of cadence, and his songs have a rhythmical quality at once exquisite and simple—as witness, for example,

Bendemeer's Stream. It begins, reader, as you remember —or forget—

> There's a bower of roses by Bendemeer's stream,
> And the nightingale sings round it all the day long,

and it seems enough to say that, if you like this kind of metre, this is exactly the kind of metre you will like. Then Henley is invigoratingly partial. If Byron has a mishap or so with a certain commandment, you will hear from Henley no uglier word than 'love'; but Shelley, he tells you roundly in your ear, lived "in open adultery" with Mary Godwin—for Henley, it is known in the market-place, loves not Shelley. Of old, also, we know that he is factious for his heroes, wears their badge like any Capulet or Montagu of Verona, and is prompt to shake a beard in their quarrel. If he encounter with any of the opposite faction, then, as Mr Kipling says:

> It was :—"Belts, belts, belts, an' that's one for you!"

And Henley is terribly handy with the belt. Now, to go back to the Shakespearean metaphor, Leigh Hunt bit his thumb at Byron, and Byron spitted him for it with the most merciless of rapiers, being no less redoubtable a duellist than his annotator. But not satisfied with putting on record Byron's drubbing, Henley proceeds himself to rub it into Leigh Hunt, and slays the slain. Not since John Wilson Croker drew on himself the twofold onslaught of Thackeray and Disraeli has any man been so luckless as this poor Leigh Hunt, gibbeted by two such skilled *carnifices* as Byron and Henley. The very odds make one inclined to strike into the quarrel first, and ask the rights of it afterwards. But it is too complex a quarrel to be thrashed out here, though we think we could show some cause on Leigh Hunt's side.

We do believe as devoutly as Henley that Keats was not without warrant in his picture of Leigh Hunt's defects; but we think also that a natural reaction from the young poet's first sanguine estimate of the elder and lesser blinded him to Hunt's virtues, which were not few nor unloveworthy. Little justice has been done to Hunt either as man or writer of late years.

. . . . . .

All things considered, Henley as the editor of Burns must be commended for courage. Burns rides the ways of literature hedged by a numerous and terrible guard of devoted Scots, and if any hat is not doffed as he passes the irreverent offender is a marked man. Who dares lay hands on a poet guarded by a nation? Now, Henley has not attempted a *bouleversement* of Burns; but he has offered an estimate of the nature of the poet's greatness as a song writer which is full likely to be ill-stomached by Scotsmen. The present reviewer once held even more treasonable views. He thought that Burns had departed from the old songs only to spoil them, and that his fine stanzas were lifted straight from the older Muse. A closer view overthrew the former notion; and now Henley's notes have modified the latter. He has shown that many supposed 'originals' were later *rifacimenti* from Burns; and, in particular, that Buchan and the Ettrick Shepherd are responsible between them for numberless fabrications. The industry which Henley has displayed in unmasking forgeries, and investigating so far as possible the genuine sources of Burns's songs, can be dimly surmised to be extraordinary, though only those who have covered similar ground can estimate it aright; and it is safe to say that from this centenary edition we may at last form a

decided judgement of the poet's place among original masters.

The songs which are pure Burns include such things as *John Anderson, Bonnie Wee Thing, Ae Fond Kiss, The Silver Tassie, My Wife's a Winsome Wee Thing, Ye Banks and Braes*—to name a few at random. To the question whether Burns could write fine songs without another man's *motif* to hang them on, I think these furnish an undoubted affirmative answer. But Burns, like Homer, is not merely a poet, but a literature. He has succeeded in fulfilling the old savage ideal—he has eaten up all his predecessors, and become possessed of their united powers. It is useless to haggle overmuch about what he borrowed: one can only envy the gigantic luck of his chance. His vamps can only be credited to him as brilliant luck brilliantly used. But he could write charming songs without such luck; though I think, on the whole, they prove that he wrote still better when he borrowed. There is more inevitable felicity when he can work on an old groundwork. *John Anderson*, indeed, has a homely pathos which stands by itself. And the early *Mary Morison*, together with the opening of *The Silver Tassie*, shows possibilities of a finer and more romantic sentiment, which might have placed him higher (to my mind) as a purely original poet had he lived in another atmosphere than that of tavern revels and village wenchings. But the poems to the better-known "Highland Mary," are touched with something of eighteenth-century artificiality—as usual, when he meant to be very fine. Taking him, borrowings and all, the merit of his songs lies in the partly dramatic kind; they display, vividly and pictorially, the life of a whole peasantry, as it has not been displayed in English literature. But it has been the

tradition to claim for them a value as *absolute* poetry, equal to that of the finest lyric work; and here I must add something to what has been said by Henley. Looked at from this standpoint, I cannot but feel that the bulk of this volume is far from complete mastery. It needs Burns's excuse that he wrote hurriedly and for a purpose. Songs begun arrestingly trail off ineffectually; eighteenth-century elegances sometimes follow on the speech of simple passion. *Bonnie Wee Thing*, charming and tender, ends with such an insipid eighteenth-century stanza. He, too often, does not know where to stop. *It was a' for our Rightfu' King* should have ended with the third stanza; the rest, far from poor, is nevertheless an anticlimax. As absolute poetry, I cannot think the bulk of these poems fit to rank with the exquisite Elizabethan lyrics, nor yet with some of the lovely snatches of the old Scottish Border muse. That muse had a magic in its simplicity not matched in these songs. Burns strangely considered *Helen of Kirconnell* "silly to contemptibility"; yet it is more exquisite than anything unborrowed he has himself written. He had emotion equal to any demands of song; but he had little imagination. He had passion and fondness; but only in one or two lyrics does he show the power of tenderness—which is not a quality very indigenous among a coarsened peasantry. Imagination and tenderness demand either the refinement of education or the refinement of pure and sweet life. These things *might* be in peasant song. They are in the songs of the Dimbovitza, which are higher as absolute poetry than anything within Burns's compass. Not because those songs are the outcome of greater genius, but because they are the outcome of a healthier and sweeter rustic state; a state

in which the women were chaste and tender, the men brave and sober. Burns could well have sung it had he known it. But he found about him no higher joys than whisky and coarse amours; and the wonder is what he made of it all, not what he failed to make of it. I believe that Burns had genius, in another age and community to have been a very great poet indeed. As it is, he was the greatest poet he saw his way to be. But how many of his lyrics would one put in an anthology of the very finest flower of song?

At any rate, our thanks are due to Mr Henley for a masterly edition, which will enable each man to answer the question for himself. One question, however, he forces upon us. Most great poets have adapted pretty freely, and with genius. Burns has adapted with genius to an unparalleled extent. But what about a great poet in whom the adaptations are usually the best parts of his poems? It requires a little consideration—perhaps a little reconsideration. And the pith of Henley's work is, I think, that it compels the question, which may impel the reconsideration—of, may it be, that adjective "great"? Even this may come of what Henley has done, by making the extent and character of Burns's adaptations, for the first time, a thing certain and indisputable.[1]

[1] This is a portion of a review which appeared in *The Academy*, March 6, 1897; and on the day following Henley wrote to Mr Hind, *The Academy's* editor: "Thompson's article is quite masterly throughout. The worst I can say against it is, that it anticipates some parts of my own terminal essay, so that I shall have to quote it instead of writing out of my own stomach. I know not which to admire the more—his critical intelligence or his intellectual courage."

A PRINCE OF INDIA ON THE PRINCE OF GAMES

THIS Jubilee year [1897] is the apogee of the British Empire; it may also fairly be considered as the apogee of cricket. The art of preparing consummate wickets—wickets which make batting an ease and a delight, bowling a game of patience and endurance—has reached its height. A brilliantly sunny summer has done such wickets full justice; and a wonderful fertility of consummate batsmen has taken full advantage of the wickets and the weather. Yet—extraordinary to relate—it has also been a year in which a race of bowlers has arisen capable of coping with these conditions. It might be supposed that they would be slow or at least medium-paced bowlers. But not so. Three of the most successful bowlers of the season have been Richardson, Mold, and Kortright—all three fast bowlers. What it means, in the way of endurance, for a fast bowler to keep up pace and length through these enormous innings on wickets enough to numb the pluck of any bowler, only a thorough cricketer can understand. Yet another consideration completes the appropriateness of the title. The peculiar feature of the Jubilee has been the way in which it has drawn attention to the bonds between England and its dependencies: and the batsman of the day who is acknowledged to be the most consummate in style and all-round power (though he may not be at the head of the averages) is an Indian Prince.

This batsman, Prince Ranjitsinhji (perhaps the finest who has appeared in England, except Grace), is the

author of this *Jubilee Book of Cricket.* A native of India teaches Englishmen their own national game; and all, with one accord, hasten to sit at his feet. He is not only a practical master in the game, but he has analyzed it as a critic analyzes the laws of literature. Training and outfit, fielding in all its branches, bowling, batting, captaincy, and umpiring are the principal divisions of his work. He even instructs the batsman how to choose his bat and batting-gloves and leg-guards. He has subjected everything, in fielding, bowling, and batting, to an unprecedented process of analysis, which provides us with a text-book at all points corresponding to modern needs. The older books were in effect based on the laws handed down from the times of underhand bowling. But the methods of modern good-length bowling, with off- and leg-break, a crowded off-field, and few chances for leg-hitting, you will seek in vain in them. The 'pull' is mentioned by them only to be reprobated. Prince Ranjitsinhji discards tradition, and the 'pull' and the 'hook' figure largely in his instructions. Nevertheless, there was real reason for the proscription of these strokes by the old players. He himself recognizes that they are dangerous off a fast bowler, even on a true wicket, and that on a wicket rendered slippery by rain which has affected the surface, or a 'sticky' wicket, they must be eschewed.

Prince Ranjitsinhji has done well to place fielding foremost, in the hope that by so doing he may stimulate attention to the most neglected, yet very important, branch of the cricketer's art. Fine fielding is very largely the work of a captain who is himself a fine fielder. Many a match has been won rather in the field than at the wicket. And, if only a boy will set himself

really to study its niceties, it is a most fascinating branch of cricket. Prince Ranjitsinhji remarks on the splendid opportunities of cover-point, and cites the Rev. Vernon Royle as the cover-point to whom all cricketers give the palm during the last thirty years. "From what one hears," he says, "he must have been a magnificent fielder." He was. And I notice the fact, because Vernon Royle may be regarded as a concrete example of the typical fielder, and the typical fielder's value. He was a pretty and stylish bat; but it was for his wonderful fielding that he was played. A ball for which hardly another cover-point would think of trying he flashed upon, and with a single action stopped it and returned it to the wicket. So placed that only a single stump was visible to him, he would throw that down with unfailing accuracy, and without the slightest pause for aim. One of the members of the Australian team in Royle's era, playing against Lancashire, shaped to start for a hit wide of cover-point. "No, no!" cried his partner; "the policeman is there!" There were no short runs anywhere in the neighbourhood of Royle. He simply terrorized the batsmen; nor was there any necessity for an extra cover—now so constantly employed. In addition to his sureness and swiftness, his style was a miracle of grace. Slender and symmetrical, he moved with the lightness of a young roe, the flexuous elegance of a leopard—it was a sight for an artist or a poet to see him field. Briggs, at his best, fell not far short in efficiency; but there was no comparison between the two in style and elegance. To be a fielder like Vernon Royle is as much worth any youth's endeavours as to be a batsman like Ranjitsinhji, or a bowler like Richardson.

In the chapter on bowling Prince Ranjitsinhji shows

that he has studied this art as closely as his own art of batting. He is full of wise counsel with regard to all the styles of bowling, and their relation to the various kinds of wickets and batsmen. Nothing in his book is more useful than his analysis of a typical game on a good wicket (from a bowler's standpoint) between two first-class sides. The batting side, under thinly disguised names, is easily to be recognized as Surrey; the bowling side, from the absence of names, is harder to be recognized. It is evidently an actual match which the writer had the chance of observing; therefore, it is possible that the other side may be Sussex.[1] I am glad to see that Prince Ranjitsinhji does not think it beneath him to recognize the possible value of lob-bowling, to expound its principles, and recommend its cultivation by cricketers who are that way inclined. He even goes so far as to surmise that other kinds of under-arm bowling might prove baffling to present-day batsmen if they

[1] Francis Thompson, his biographer records, was, in his youth, much at the Old Trafford ground, and there he stored meticulous memories that would topple out in his talk, as they inferentially do in this article. The most historic of the matches he witnessed was that between Lancashire and Gloucestershire in 1878; and looking back as a Londoner later he celebrated it in verses, of which one is now commonly accepted as the best of its kind:

"It is little I repair to the matches of the Southern folk
Though my own red roses there may blow;
It is little I repair to the matches of the Southern folk,
Though the red roses crest the caps, I know.
For the field is full of shades as I near the shadowy coast,
And a ghostly batsman plays to the bowling of a ghost,
And I look through my tears on a soundless-clapping host
As the run-stealers flicker to and fro,
To and fro:—
O my Hornby and my Barlow long ago!"

were revived. I am of opinion that this would certainly be the case. On one point I think that the author does not quite bring out the peculiarities of under-arm. Namely, that 'good-length bowling' is not as continuously necessary to under-arm as to over-arm bowling. Now, I think that the under-arm bowler can afford to pitch his balls well up, more than the over-arm bowler can; and that it often pays to do so—at least, against the present race of batsmen, who are unaccustomed to under-arm. For two reasons. In the first place, the over-arm bowler shrinks from pitching his balls up on account of the extra exertion involved. He does so only occasionally, as Prince Ranjitsinhji states, on account of this exertion. The under-arm bowler, on the contrary, because of the ease and naturalness of his action, can pitch his balls well up without any difficulty. In the second place, because of the difference of trajectory between the two methods of bowling. An over-arm ball describes approximately a parabola, and when it is well pitched up comes therefore thoroughly on to the bat. But the drop of an under-arm ball, particularly if it be slow, is so much more sudden that it may comparatively and roughly be considered a straight drop. Even if fast or quick-medium, it is much more abrupt in descent than a like over-arm ball. Consequently a batsman who attempts to clout a well-pitched-up under-arm as he would a like over-arm ball stands a fair chance of playing over it, especially when he is unaccustomed to this kind of bowling. If, on the other hand, he plays back, it is difficult to get the ball away. So that he may be deceived, and if he adopts caution is not likely to score off the ball. Yorkers, again, are perfectly easy to an under-arm bowler; they put no great strain on the

weakest arm. Admirable are all the author's lessons on bowling, had we space to follow them; and admirable his concluding declaration that it is head-work, and the study of the batsman's peculiarities, which puts the crown on a bowler. "There are bowlers," he says, "who, for some reason or other, seem to fascinate the batsman, and make him do what they want in spite of himself. . . . The batsman has to fight not only against the particular ball bowled, but against a mysterious unseen influence. There are 'demon' bowlers in more senses than one. They are few and far between; but when they come, they win matches by their own individual might." In other words, genius tells in cricket as in all else.

In batting, Prince Ranjitsinhji is on his own ground, and he dwells on forward play in a manner not to be met in the older treatises, though he confesses that his own predilections (as might be expected from a player so quick of eye and supple of wrist) are towards back play. His minute and perfect instructions must be sought in the book. Only one point I will comment on, because it is not borne out in the illustrations, though the author seems to imagine it is. He says, quite truly, that the position of the left (that is, the upper) hand should be changed in the forward stroke. That is, the left hand should be shifted round the bat, so that the finger-tips are presented towards the bowler, instead of the back of the hand, as in the ordinary position of holding the bat. Some players, he allows, do not so twist the upper hand round the bat in playing forward. He refers to the illustrations to exemplify the action. But, unless my eyes are deceived, all the batsmen here photographed in the act of playing forward have the left hand unchanged. If so, it is a singular chance; for

there can be no doubt of its advantage. The position of the hand may be understood by reference to the portrait of Prince Ranjitsinhji playing back; for here he has the left hand shifted round as it should be in forward play. It is advisable, above all, in forward defensive play. And this because it guards against the two chief dangers in such play. These are, that the bat may not be kept straight, so as to cover the stump from top to bottom; and that the tip of the blade may be pushed forward in advance of the upper portion of the blade, so as to put the ball up and give a catch. If the left hand be not shifted round, it exercises by its position a natural drag upon the handle of the bat, so as to deflect the upper portion of the blade to the left, and leave the superior portion of the stump exposed. Moreover, besides this lateral deflection of the handle, and consequently of the upper part of the blade, it also exercises a backward drag upon them, so as to leave the tip of the blade dangerously advanced, with the likelihood of a catch. Careful practice may overcome both these tendencies; but in a moment of excitement and inattention they are liable to assert themselves with ruinous results. Whereas the twisting of the left hand round the handle mechanically keeps the bat straight, and the upper portion of the blade well advanced over the lower. A single experiment and comparison will convince any player of this. Another point which may be learned by studying the various photographs of Prince Ranjitsinhji batting given in this book is, that a batsman will do well to alter the relative position of his hands in varying kinds of play. Thus, the Prince's ordinary position at the wicket is with the two hands together at the top of the handle; but in back play his right hand is slid down towards the blade. In glance-

play back and forward, his right hand is apparently about two inches above the blade, but well separated from the left hand. Some batsmen, who go in for steady play, ordinarily keep the right hand a little above the blade, and apart from the left. Such a batsman, if he lunges forward to drive a ball, where an inch or two of reach makes all the difference, will do well to slide the right hand up to the left at the top of the handle, in order to get the full length of the bat in reaching out at the ball. In fact, any adaptable batsman will find the use of not keeping his hands in one uniform stiff position for all kinds of strokes. Here is part of the value of the instantaneous photographs in this book. It may be doubtful whether Prince Ranjitsinhji himself was conscious of this feature in his play—at least, he never mentions it; and so the photographs supply hints sometimes not given by the author.

Upon back play, and the methods of making it available for offensive purposes, the author is excellent. The subtlest and newest refinements of stroke all round the wicket are expounded with beautiful clearness: the drive to cover-point or extra-cover, the peculiar stroke with a horizontal bat between a forward-cut and a drive, leg-glances and forcing-strokes on the on-side; and, above all, those once-condemned strokes made possible by the perfection of modern wickets. There is one very significant omission. The draw, that most stylish stroke of the older batsman, is never once described. The conditions of modern bowling have, indeed, rendered it obsolete. The last time I saw it used was by A. P. Lucas in a match between England and Australia. On wrist-play he is very strong, as might be supposed from the most beautiful wrist-player in England.

Talk of modern enthusiasm for cricket! It is nothing to that of the ancients of the game. Witness this of the Rev. John Mitford, describing a visit he paid to Beldham's cottage, when that veteran of Hambledon and Surrey was in his last years: "In his kitchen, black with age, hangs the trophy of his victories, the delight of his youth, the exercise of his manhood, and the glory of his age—his BAT. Reader, believe me when I tell you, I trembled when I touched it; it seemed an act of profaneness, of violation. I pressed it to my lips, and returned it to its sanctuary."

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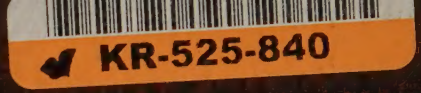
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